

## Roman Empire's final frontier: Newly-displayed 'distance slabs' from Scotland's Antonine Wall marked the northernmost point of legions' conquest

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It was the 'final frontier' of domination which spanned across the entire width of Scotland and was the northernmost point of the Roman empire.

Now previously unseen elaborately-carved parts of the 39 mile-long Antonine Wall have gone on display, giving a new insight into the lavish victory sculptures created by the Roman legions.

Roman soldiers who pushed the empire north of Hadrian's Wall marked their triumphs with hand-carved 'distance slabs' commemorating parts of the newly-completed Antonine Wall.



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**Intricate:** The elaborately-carved 'distance slabs' from the Antonine Wall were made to commemorate newly-formed parts of the Roman Empire

The building of the new frontier lines was the culmination of a renewed attempt by the Romans to extend their empire into what is now southern Scotland.

The Antonine Wall was built around AD 142, early in the reign of Antoninus Pius, Hadrian's successor as emperor.

Antonius Pius pushed the Roman border north from Hadrian's wall in order to secure a military victory that would be well received back in Rome.

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Many parts of the Antonine Wall can still be seen in Scotland, while the 'distance slabs' carved by soldiers were generally more elaborately decorated than their counterparts on Hadrian's Wall.

The mighty Antonine turf wall was erected by Roman soldiers of the II Augusta, VI Victrix and XX Valeria Victrix legions, and stretched coast to coast across Scotland between the firths of Forth and Clyde.



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**Commemoration: An alter to Diana and Apollo, left and a slab decorated with triton and a kneeling captive are also on display**

The distance slabs would feature such scenes as Victory placing a laurel wreath on a Roman legionary standard, and the distinctive mascots of the soldiers' legions.

Sculptures also clearly project the move north as a splendid military victory: several depict Caledonians being trampled by Roman cavalry, or

simply crouching in submission, bound and naked.

The display at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow features 16 of the surviving 19 distance slabs from Antonine Wall.

Of the missing three, one is in Edinburgh's National Museum, one is at Glasgow's Kelvinside art gallery, and one was destroyed in an 1896 fire in Chicago after being sold to America.

All three of the other stones are represented as casts.

Victory in pushing the Roman empire forward through the Antonine Wall was shortlived for the Romans however.

The wall was the northernmost point of the Roman empire for 20 years between the 140s and 160s AD before its forces were withdrawn from Scotland by the mid 160s.

Hadrian's Wall became once again the frontier of the province until the final withdrawal of the legions from Britannia in the early 5th century AD.

Describing the construction of the Antonine Wall by Antonius Pius, Professor David Gaimster, director of the Hunterian, said: 'It was an act of propoganda by an emperor who had not held any significant military command, and its success ensured his position.'



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**A fountainhead from Bearsden Roman fort has been unearthed for the display at the Hunterian Museum**



© Alamy  
**Relics: Parts of the Antonine Wall, which stretched from coast to coast across Scotland, can still be seen today**





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**Final frontier: The Antonine Wall, seen here near Falkirk, was the northernmost point of the Roman Empire for 20 years**

Roman soldiers are thought to have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle while pushing the empire north, according to Professor Gaimster.

Bathhouses have since been found along the wall, including in what is now Bearsden, Glasgow, while studies have shown legions enjoyed a diet including olives, wine and figs during the occupation.

Professor Gaimster said evidence found connected with the wall indicates that occupiers were 'as sophisticated a Mediterranean lifestyle as legionaries would have done anywhere else in the empire'.

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